

SMALL BUSINESS IS BIG BUSINESS AT JAX DISTRICT

By Christina Plunkett, Information Management
Photos courtesy South Water Management District

UTILIZING SMALL BUSINESS IS BIG BUSINESS FOR THE ARMY CORPS.

Over the years, the Jacksonville District has been recognized as a leader in the small business arena by working together to ensure small, disadvantaged and minority businesses are included in the District's need for contracted services and supplies that help meet varying project goals.

Debra Nix, who was named Small Business Specialist of the Year for the Army Corps in 1999 and 1997, leads the District's Small and Disadvantaged Business Program. She's been the program's deputy since February 1997 and a contracting specialist for 20 years, so she knows the important role small business plays not only for America's growth, but for the project sponsor/customer and the federal government towards ensuring a good quality contract at the best price.

For Fiscal Year 1999, the District awarded a total of approximately \$254 million in contracts. In the accomplishment of the small business program goals, 48 percent was awarded to small businesses, 30 percent was awarded to small disadvantaged companies and 6.3 percent was awarded to women-owned firms.

The District supports the small

business program as a team effort which is why it is so successful. "It is not a small business office program but a District program where the divisions help make decisions on how we are going to support the program through our projects," Nix explained. According to Nix, a typical contractual decision will involve input from Project Management, Engineering Division, Construction-Operations and Contracting as to the technical needs, required performance aspects and difficulty level of a project. Team members' input ensures the District is making the best business decision while supporting the program.

"Compared to some other districts, Jacksonville has a wonderful working relationship which helps facilitate the program," Nix said. Because of Jacksonville's team support, Nix sees her role as primarily a mediator who balances the District's technical concerns with the U.S. Small Business Administration's (SBA) desires and the customer's needs.

The purpose of the District's small business program is to aid, counsel and assist small businesses to ensure everyone gets their fair share of the contracted work. Nix works closely with the SBA, which was established in 1953 to provide financial, technical and

management assistance to help Americans start, run and grow their businesses. Although the SBA teaches small and disadvantaged businesses how to work with government and private industry, it was discovered that because of each agencies' different procurement regulations, government contracting offices must have a small business area to help businesses learn how to work with a particular agency.

Contracting with small and minority businesses is a win-win situation. By helping small businesses grow, the increased competition makes it possible for the federal government to solicit more bids which ensures taxpayer's dollars are getting quality goods and services at the most economical price. "Because we work for the federal government, we have a responsibility to support the full realm of business concerns," Nix said.



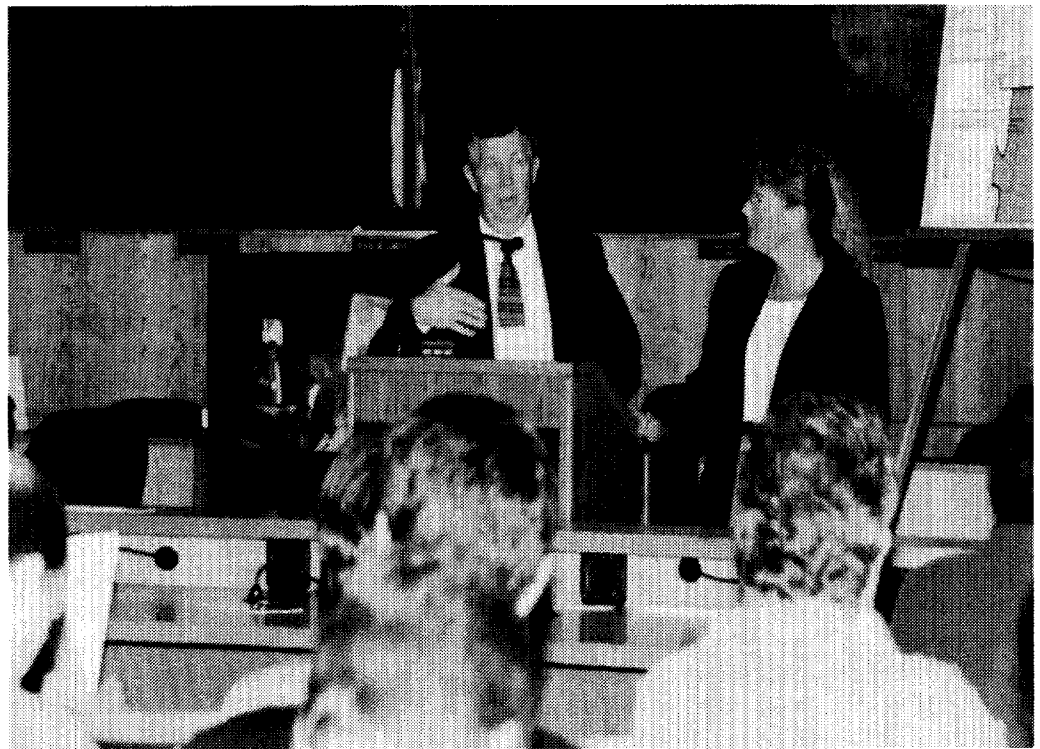
Col. Joe R. Miller, left, Jacksonville District Engineer, and Frank Finch, Executive Director, South Florida Water Management District, talk about their agency's first combined procurement conference after giving opening remarks.

One of Nix's responsibilities while acting as a liaison between District needs and SBA regulations is to ensure all types of socio-economic categories are supported. Headquarters USACE revises its small business program goals, recently changed to "floors," (to signify a starting rather than ending point) annually. For Fiscal Year 2000, the overall floor remains at 37.3 percent, which is the minimum that contract awarded dollars will go to small businesses. However, in the new millennium, there will be a greater emphasis on utilizing women-owned small businesses. Although this area's increase from four to five percent may appear insignificant, in reality, it is a substantial and important increase due to the fact few women-owned businesses involve goods and services the Army Corps typically contracts for.

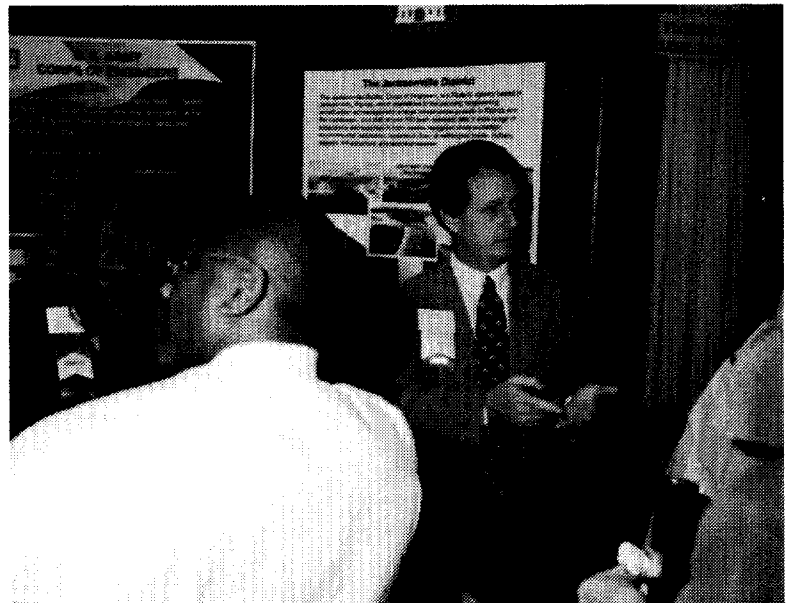
So what does the Army Corps buy? At least 90 percent of the District's obligated funds goes to construction and engineering services. Construction includes purchases of barracks, dining facilities, maintenance shops, hangers, hospitals, airfields, roads, levees, dams, hazardous and toxic waste remediation and navigation dredging. Engineering services include concept studies, master planning, surveying and mapping, and engineer-

ing studies, design, construction and inspection duties. (For a business to qualify under the SBP in the construction field, they have to earn \$17 million or less gross receipts per year averaged over the past three years. For engineering services, the standard is \$4 million or less gross receipts per year averaged over the past three years.)

Other services the Army Corps may contract for include janitorial, lawn and park maintenance, real estate appraisal and stenographic. Supplies purchased by the Army Corps run from generators, turbines, heating, ventilation and air conditioning equipment to construction-type needs such as lumber, cement, repair parts and petroleum products.



Dennis Duke, left, answers questions, as Debra Nix looks on, after presenting a broad overview of Corps projects and discussing future work.



Jim Boone answers questions concerning Support For Others projects during a recent government and corporate procurement opportunities conference.

Despite the fact that these types of goods and services have not traditionally been women-owned businesses, it is the categories within the small business program that will help

make it possible for the District to meet, if not exceed, the five percent floor in Fiscal Year 2000. There are two ways small or disadvantaged businesses

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receive their fair share—through direct awards or awards from large prime contractors.

Programs within the direct award area include the small business set aside and the SBA Section 8A set aside where competition is limited to small business participation only. Authorized by Section 8A of the Small Business Act, this program goes a step further than the set aside program by allowing SBA approval of certain firms to receive sole source contracts or a competitive contract limited to competition among other Section 8A firms only. The SBA approves the firms that can qualify for the Section 8A Program, based on economic or social disadvantage, with its purpose aimed at diminishing past effects of discrimination.

Although it may appear that the qualifying Section 8A Program firms have it made, they are only paid a fair market price for their services and there is still competition between the 100 Florida 8A contractors. In return, the work received is usually high quality because of their close working relationship with the District and customer, and their strong desire to do a good job.

If they don't do a good job, their services are not used again by the District or the large prime contractors. When primary contractors subcontract work out to small businesses, this is another way all concerns receive

their fair share. According to Nix, there is a clause in all awarded contracts requiring prime contractors to meet established floors similar to the Army Corps' guidelines. Of the dollars the prime firms subcontract out, at least 61.2 percent should be awarded to small businesses. From that amount at least 9.1 percent must go to disadvantaged companies and at least five percent to women-owned firms.

Another way the District ensures small businesses are included in the contractual pie, is through participation in and sponsorship of a variety of outreach efforts. Throughout the year, Nix sets up conferences in Tampa, Ft. Lauderdale, Orlando, and other cities in Florida, as well as in the Antilles, to ensure small businesses are aware of District needs and the federal regulations to participate in the program. Some of the conferences the District has participated in this year include the Federal Dollars and Sense for Women at Jacksonville, the Procurement Conference for Supply, Service and Construction Contractors at the University of South Florida, and the Florida Regional Minority Purchasing Council Trade Show

at the Ft. Lauderdale Convention Center. Nix is excited about an upcoming conference because it is the first The Construction and Environmental Contracting Opportunities in Central and South Florida Conference, which took place in November was the first time the District partnered with the South Florida Water Management District for this type of

effort. (See article about this event.)

The Internet also provides a tremendous source of information for a newly founded or disadvantaged business. Nix maintains the District's small business homepage at <http://www.saj.usace.army.mil/smbiz/index.html> that contains everything from subcontracting op-



Contract Specialist Kathie Duke explained how the Corps advertises, solicits and evaluates offers on its construction and environmental requirements.



During conference workshop breaks, Contractors have the opportunity to have their questions answered by agency representatives at the exhibit area.



Debra Nix, right, confers with Capt. E.J. Fishburne, Fleet Industrial Supply Center, and Col. Joe R. Miller, Jacksonville District Engineer, before they welcome attendees to a recent procurement conference.

opportunities to a list of active prime contracts.

Nix is pleased with the exceptional working relationship between District divisions/employees and the SBA in nurturing the small business program. "Because our support of the small business program is a District-wide team effort geared at making the best

business decisions for the Corps, we have developed a special trust and respect with the SBA," Nix said. "The SBA knows we are dedicated to using small businesses and this can only mean a bright future for everyone—the taxpayer, the Corps and America's business growth," Nix said. □

ARMY CORPS AND WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT SPONSOR SUCCESSFUL PROCUREMENT CONFERENCE

It was a standing-room-only crowd for the first Army Corps and South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) jointly sponsored procurement conference (the Central and South Florida Construction,

Environmental and A-E Contracting Opportunities Conference) held recently at the SFWMD offices located in West Palm Beach, Fla. More than 220 representatives from construction, environmental and

architect-engineering firms filled the SFWMD auditorium to its capacity to learn the latest on contracting opportunities and assistance programs for small businesses.

Opening remarks for the one-day conference were made by Col. Joe R. Miller, Jacksonville District Engineer, and Frank Finch, Executive Director, SFWMD.

Both Miller and Finch encouraged the attendees to partner with the agencies by participating in the procurement opportunities available throughout south Florida.

A special appearance was made by Michael Collins, Chairman, Governing Board, SFWMD. Mr. Collins was appointed to his position by Gov. Jeb Bush in March 1999 and his remarks emphasized the governor's strong commitment to engaging small business concerns located throughout the state in SFWMD and Army Corps procurement opportunities.

Debra Nix, Deputy for Small Business, Jacksonville District, coordinated the day's events which offered a diverse workshop. Topics included: Overview of Projects; How to Identify and Submit Offers on Construction/Environmental Requirements; and How to

Market, Identify & Offer on Architect-Engineer Requirements. The speakers for each workshop were project managers, contract specialists, and engineers from both the Jacksonville District and the SFWMD. The goal of the workshops was to identify upcoming procurement opportunities and assist the small business firms in learning how to do business with the Corps and SFWMD.

The Jacksonville District workshop speakers addressed information that the firms need in order to identify and submit offers on Corps contracting opportunities. Dennis Duke, Principal Assistant to the Deputy District Engineer for Project Management, presented a broad overview of Corps projects, including the Kissimmee River Restoration, Modified Water Deliveries to ENP, West Palm Beach Canal (C-51)/STA-1E, South Dade County C-111, and C&SF Critical Projects. Duke also discussed future work and the Corps' involvement during disaster relief efforts. Kathie Duke, Contract Specialist, A-E and Construction Branch, Contracting Division, reviewed how the Corps advertises, solicits and evaluates offers on its construction and environmental requirements. Toney Lanier, Chief, Specifications Section, Design Branch, Engineering Division, also

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reviewed these actions in relation to architect-engineer requirements.

Seven exhibit tables were set-up to allow the small business firms to speak directly with Corps and SFWMD representatives, as well as representatives from NASA, Naval Facilities Engineering Command, the Small Business Administration, Florida Atlantic University, and the Electronic Commerce Resource Center.

The conference's success was evidenced by the capacity crowd of business firm representatives and the numerous positive comments received from small business owners. Attendees stated their appreciation to the Corps and SFWMD representatives for the project and process information presented. Comment cards were provided to all attendees who were encouraged to return them with suggestions and feedback on how to improve future similar events. For those agencies who couldn't attend, the Corps Power Point presentations and a list of conference attendees (representative's name, firm name, address, phone number, service offered, and size of firm) is now available under "Business Opportunities" at the Jacksonville District internet web site. The Jacksonville District anticipates co-hosting/participating in a similar conference in late spring 2000. □

SMALL BUSINESS 'VITAL STATISTICS'

America's 23 million small businesses employ more than 50 percent of the private workforce, generate more than half of the nation's gross domestic product, and are the principal source of new jobs in the U.S. economy.

Did you know that...

❖ There are approximately 23 million small businesses in the U.S.?

❖ New business formation reached another record level in 1998?

❖ There were 842,357 new employer firms in 1996-the highest ever and a 2.8 percent increase over the record of 819,477 new firms in 1995?

❖ Small-business-dominated industries produced an estimated 64 percent of the 2.5 million new jobs created during 1996?

❖ Small firms hire a larger proportion of employees who are younger workers, older workers, women or workers who prefer to work part-time?

❖ Small businesses provide 67 percent of workers with their first jobs and initial on the job training in basic skills?

Small businesses...

❖ Provide virtually all of the net new jobs added to the economy.

❖ Represent 99.7 percent of all employers.

❖ Employ 53 percent of the private workforce.

❖ Provide 47 percent of all sales in the country.

❖ Provide 55 percent of innovations.

❖ Account for 35 percent of federal contract dollars.

❖ Account for 28 percent of jobs in high technology sectors.

❖ Account for 51 percent of private sector output.

❖ Represent 96 percent of all U.S. exporters.